The GIRL A HORSE AND A DOG

By

FRANCIS LYNDE

CHAPTER I.

Cousin Percy's Little Joke.

I suppose every one has had the experience of waking in the middle of the night to find everything perfectly still and quiet and normal, and yet with the impression persisting that there had been a tremendous crash of some sort just before the waking senses were alive enough to realize it. It was some such razing jolt as this that was given me on the morning when I was called in, with the other members of the family, to listen to the reading of my grandfather's will.

But, first, however, to give some idea of the conditions precedent, as a lawyer would say. My father—good, easy-going, comfort-loving Dad!—never owned what Grandfather Dudley, pursing his thin lips and snapping the words out, called "the money sense." As an architect high in his profession and with fine artistic feeling for the beautiful in buildings, he earned a liberal income—and spent it; or so much of it that there was barely enough left after his death to provide for my mother and sister, and to keep me going, as you might say, in an exceedingly modest manner. Without work, I mean. I may as well confess, at once, that I had never acquired the work habit. I was always "going to," but it was so fatally easy to keep on postponing the chilling plunge. I suppose I had been ready on at least half a dozen occasions to take a dive into some pool with a salary attachment; but always some good friend would bob up to say, "Oh, come on, Stannie, old man; we're lacking just one more to make up the bunch. Don't be a clam. Time enough to settle down when you have to," and then it would be all off.

Besides, you see, there was always Grandfather Jasper in the background. He had money—lashings of it, so we all believed; and it had been a family understanding for years that he intended splitting the bulk of it, fifty-fifty, between my cousin Percy and me. Before we go any farther, let me set it down that Cousin Percy was—and is—all the seventeen different kinds of things that I am not, and never wished to be; smooth, neat, well-groomed, a "grind" in college and a "perfect dear" with the girls, ambitious as the very devil, and measuring his friends by the amount of "pull" they might be able to exert in his behalf; there you have him from the crown of his well-brushed little head to his patent-leather pumps.

"You're a fright, Stannie," he would say, in his carefully polished diplomatic manner—he had a billet in the Department of State at Washington, and was in training for the legation service abroad—"you are a perfect fright. Three whole years out of college, and you haven't done a single, solitary useful thing yet. When are you going to begin? And, incidentally, how long are you going to keep Lisette waiting?"

Oh, Lord!—right there was another knot in the tangle—Lisette. We had agreed to agree—Lisette and I—some six months or so in advance of Grandfather Jasper's death, and we were both perfectly well assured, and had assured each other a dozen times, that my income from Dad's estate wasn't more than half big enough to marry on. You see, it was this way: Lisette was one of a family of four girls in a mighty expensive household, and there wasn't anything to lean on on that side of the fence. Though, of course, we never discussed it brutally in so many words, we were waiting for that fifty-fifty look-in at the will which family tradition declared had already been drawn up, signed, sealed, witnessed and put away in cold storage; otherwise in the safe-keeping of Grandfather Jasper's family lawyer.

All of which may serve to bring us back to that nightmare effect registered at the start. When the Dudley will was taken out of the icebox and read to the assembled members of the family, there were at least two shocking surprises. Jasper hadn't been anywhere near as rich as we had all been thinking he was; that his modest manner of living had been, perhaps, as much a matter of necessity as of choice. Bad investments—of which the family had never heard so much as a whisper—had cut his fortune down to something less than half a million, all told. That was shock Number One; and shock Number Two was strictly personal to me: Grandfather Jasper had left me his love and best wishes, and had willed the money and property—all of it, mind you—to Cousin Percy, giving as his reason that he thought Percy would make better use of it.

Of course, I had everybody's sympathy and condolence—even Percy's, for that matter. My mother wept; and, as I recall it, Lisette managed to compass a tear or so when I told her what had happened; or rather what had so ignominiously failed to happen.

"Whatever will you do?" she faltered. "I suppose you will really have to go to work now, won't you, Stannie?"

"Perish the thought!" I told her; then I gave the good reasons why there was no hope for us in that direction. "A fat chance I'd have to earn any real money. I can navigate a yacht—a little,—drive a motor, ride a polo pony, and play a fair hand at bridge and the other great American game. I think these are the sum total of my shining accomplishments. You needn't return the ring," I grinned, seeing that she was looking at it rather regretfully. "You can wear it on some other finger, you know."

"Yes; I suppose I could do that," she agreed; and I'm blest if she didn't shift it to a finger of the other hand right there and then!

It was less than a week after this little fade-out scene with Lisette that Percy's letter came. This is what it said:

"Dear Stannie:

"I know just about how you felt last week when you heard Grandfather Jasper's will read, and it isn't going to make you feel any better now when I tell you that I knew of its provisions more than a year ago. When the will was drawn, grandfather showed it to me, and gave me a sealed envelope, which I was to open after his death. That envelope, as I knew at the time, contained, among other things, a codicil to the will. By its provisions you are to receive a legacy under certain conditions which were to be revealed to you at such time as I might think best.

"Your portion of Grandfather Jasper's property was worth, at its latest valuation, something like $440,000. It lies in a perfectly safe repository, situated between the 105th and 110th degrees of longitude west from Greenwich, and the 35th and 40th degrees north latitude. When you find it, you will be able to identify it by the presence of a girl with brown hair and blue eyes and small mole on her left shoulder, a piebald horse which the girl rides, and a dog with a split face—half black and half white. You will be more than likely to find the three together; and if you make the acquaintance of the girl, you'll be on the trail of your legacy.

"So there you are, Stannie, old boy; there's your fortune. All you've got to do is to go to work and find it. Perhaps by that time you will have acquired the working habit—which is what Grandfather Jasper hoped might prove to be the case.

"Wishing you great joy in your search, I am,

"Your affectionate cousin,

"PERCY."

Naturally, I had a quiet little laugh over this screed of Percy's, taking it for a joke; a poor joke and in rather bad taste, I thought. In that mood I handed the letter to Lisette for her to read. She didn't laugh, but she did look a bit scornful and put about, if you know what I mean.

"I don't suppose the blue-eyed girl would appeal to you," she said, "though the horse and the dog might. When do you start?"

We discovered that Meridian 105 west of Greenwich split the state of Colorado just beyond Denver, Colorado Springs and Pueblo, and the hunting-ground plotted out for me took in three-fourths of the remainder of the state, a slice of Utah, a good bit bigger slice of New Mexico, with a bite out of the northeastern corner of Arizona, just for good measure.

"Me for the wild and woolly!" I brayed. "Don't you see me rigged out in a nice, hairy pair of 'shaps' and riding hell-bent-for-leather—I believe that's the phrase—over the snow-capped peaks or the boundless prairies, as the case may be? But just imagine Percy the immaculate pulling a bone-head joke like this!"

"You are taking it for a joke?" she questioned.

"Sure I am; and it's a rather rotten one at that, I should say—considering the source."

"Then you won't go to look for the blue-eyed girl with nut-brown hair and the cunning little mole? Think of what you may be missing!"

For just one crazy minute I had a hunch, or a premonition, or whatever you like to call it, that the letter might not be a joke. Grandfather Jasper had always been a bit eccentric—a rich man's privilege and a rich old man's incontestable right. What if he had actually done this thing to me?—a thing scarcely less devastating than cutting me off without a penny? On the spur of the moment I said:

"If I should go, would you wait for me, Lisette?"

She took her time about answering—a good and sufficient plenty of it.

"I think perhaps I'd better not change the ring back, Stannie," she said, sort of wintrily. "If there is any money and you should happen to find it, you would probably fling it all away before you could get back to Boston. Besides, there is the blue-eyed girl; if she should bring you a fortune, you'd have to marry her, wouldn't you? You are big and strong, and—well—er—nice in a good many ways, Stannie, and much too good-looking for your own good; but when you marry—if you do marry—you'd better be sure that the girl has money enough to buy her own hats. I haven't enough, as you know."

"I know only too well that the love-in-a-cottage idea has never appealed to you," I said, with the regretful stop pulled all the way out in deference to the sentimental decencies.

"Not in the least, Stannie, dear; not in the littlest least."

This appeared to be the end of our rather lukewarm love-dream, and to be really honest and aboveboard about it, I am obliged to confess that it didn't break as many bones for me as I suppose it should have. Anyway, a half-hour or so after I had said good-by to Lisette I met Jack Downing; and when he asked me if I didn't want to go with him and a bunch of the fellows for a little spin down the coast of Maine in his motor cruiser, I fell for the invitation so suddenly that he hadn't a ghost of a chance to back out, if he had wanted to.

So, a few hours beyond that touching little scene at "The Rockerie," you may figure me, if you please, spinning the wheel of one of the nattiest little boats on the North shore, with a fresh nor'easter blowing and the sea getting up to give me the time of my young life to hold the Guinevere to her course, nor' nor'east, half a point east, as we lifted the Shoals on our port bow.

In such jolly good company as we had aboard the stout ship Guinevere, three full days elapsed before a thought of Percy or his joke ever entered my head again; and it's a ten-to-one shot that I wouldn't have thought of him, or it, during the remainder of the cruise if we hadn't been obliged to tie up at Rockland for motor repairs. This, as I recall it, was on the fourth day, and it was a

You Can Figure Me, If You Please, Spinning the Wheel of One of the Nattiest Little Boats on the North Shore.

dog that made me remember; a mongrel cur that followed the motor repairman down to the wharf; a most disreputable looking mongrel, at that, but—by Jove! he had the magic markings! Half of his face, measuring from a line drawn straight down over the tip of his nose, was black, and the other half was a dingy, dirty white.

So then I did a little rapid figuring on train schedules. If Percy had left Washington as I knew he was planning to, my diplomatic cousin should have been, at that figuring moment, just about due in San Francisco. That being the case, or the likelihood, I toddled up to the telegraph office and sent a message, addressing it in care of the captain of whatever might be the next steamer due to sail for ports in China. All I said was: "Your letter was as funny as an hour in a dentist's chair. Bon voyage to you."

Night found us still tied to the Rockland wharf; and just as we were getting up from dinner in the yacht's saloon, here came a boy with a telegram. The wire was from Percy, and it said:

"Don't be a complete fool. It was no joke at all. Ask my lawyer."

Even then, I didn't go off at half-cock, though I have often been called an impulsive jackass. The thing was still too ridiculous to bite very hard. But farther along in the evening, when I got to thinking it over, and more especially when it was shoved in upon me that I really did owe it to Lisette not to turn down even the tenth part of a chance to provide her with the means of buying her future hats, the die was cast, as the play-writers say. I made some sort of a foolish excuse to Jack Downing and the other fellows, caught a night train for Boston, stopped off at the home station long enough to pack a couple of grips and to tell my mother and sister good-by, and the thing was—oh, no; not done—nothing like that. It was only just begun.

CHAPTER II.

A Needle in a Haystack.

Since my happy hunting-ground began in the middle of Colorado, I took a ticket to Denver by way of Chicago and Omaha. As I recall it now, it was after the train had passed North Platte that I first became sensibly conscious, as you might say, of the fact that the man in the opposite section of the sleeping-car had a little Pullman table set up in front of him, and was studying maps—and blue-prints. He was a rather efficient-looking fellow of maybe thirty-two or three, with dark hair and eyes, and what Lisette would have called a determined nose, and he sported a beard and mustaches, nut-brown as to color, and neatly trimmed.

Farther along we met in the smoking room, at a time when the stuffy little den had no other occupants. Mr. Opposite Section's only cigar turned out to have a broken wrapper, so I naturally tendered my own pocket-case. That served to break the ice and we talked, dribbling along from one commonplace to another until finally Brown-beard said:

"You don't by any chance happen to be a mining engineer, do you?"

"Far be it from me," I laughed; "nothing so useful as that."

"I didn't know," he hastened to say, half apologetically. "I saw you studying maps as we came along."

Now, ordinarily I'm apt to talk a lot too much about my own affairs—I'll admit it; but this was one time when I had a sort of hunch not to. So I merely said:

"I saw you doing the same thing."

"Sure you did," he admitted cheerfully. Then he told me his name—which I got as Bullton, or Bulletin, or something like that—and said he was a mining engineer, which was the reason why he had asked me if I wasn't one.

Past that, the talk ran mostly upon his profession, and since the mysterious hunch was still nudging me, I let him have the floor, so to speak, figuring chiefly myself as a good listener.

"Yes; we do run across some rather queer propositions in our trade," he said, after he had given me some sort of an idea of what a mining engineer's job is like. "In my own experience, for example, the only sure shot I have ever had—or possibly ever will have—got away from me."

It was up to me to bite, and, of course, I did it.

"How was that?"

"The man died," he replied laconically.

That sounded rather interesting, so I gave him another pinch.

"Tell me about it; if it won't bore you."

He grinned good-naturedly—and accepted another cigar out of my pocket-case.

He Grinned Good-Naturedly and Accepted Another Cigar.

"You'll be the one to be bored. It was this way: A little over a year ago I was on my way to Chicago with a report that I had been making on some properties in the Cripple Creek district. In the Denver-Omaha Pullman I fell in with a nice old gentleman who had been buying himself a gold brick in the shape of a flooded mine. The mine had at one time been a 'producer,' though not by any means what you'd call a 'bonanza.' After a rather extended dividend-paying period—I don't know just how long, though it was some years—the luck changed, as sometimes happens. In sinking and drifting the operators had uncovered another vein which was exceedingly rich. Don't let me talk your arm off."

"Go ahead," said I. "My arms are insured."

"Well, at about the time that they struck this new underlying vein, they also struck water; so much of it as to lead them to suspect that they had tapped an underground lake. The old gentleman wasn't exactly a woolly sheep—in the Wall Street sense of the term. He had owned stock in the mine for a long time, and it had been paying him dividends, right along. So naturally, after the new strike was announced, he was perfectly willing to own more. I don't know what his investment was, but he gave me to understand that it was something like half a million. In less than a month after the deal was closed the mine was drowned and went out of business."

"Still, I don't see your lost opportunity," I threw in.

"I'm coming to that. As it happens, my specialty as an engineer is the unwatering of wet mines. The old gentleman had maps and profiles with him; the records of a very careful and excellent topographical survey. I'm reasonably certain that I discovered a way in which that mine can be drained at comparatively small expense.

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Died at Gadberry.

On Monday evening Dec. 5th, 1922, the death angel visited the home of Mr. and Mrs. R. S. Thomas and claimed as its victim their beloved and only son, Robert. He was afflicted with typhoid fever. All that loving friends and medical skill could do were done, but to no avail. The Lord's will must be done.

Robert was born Nov. 14,1904, died Dec. 5th., 1921, making his age 17 years and 21 days.

He the only boy Mr. Thomas had out of four children and oh! how sad and hard it is to give up the only boy brother. For weeks his father and mother watched tenderly by his bedside, hoping and praying that his life might be spared, but Gods will is unchangeable. The night before he died he threw out his arms to his loving mother and said: "I must go home, I can't wait for you all."

The funeral and burial took place at the Stone graveyard, many relatives and friends being present to pay the last sad rites.

We would say to the bereaved father and mother and sisters, weep not for him, but let each day be a preperation for a meeting on that beautiful shore where there will be no more good byes.

God in his wisdom has recalled the bloom his love had given, and though the body slumbers here the soul is safe in heaven.

May the Lord bless and comfort the bereaved parents and sisters is the prayer of the writer.

R. H. Bell.